

J. P. STURGE & SONS
OF BRISTOL

1760 - 1960

Surveyors, Land Agents & Auctioneers



A Bicentenary Memoir

J. P. STURGE & SONS

The Firm of J. P. Sturge & Sons of Bristol, Surveyors and Land Agents, was founded in or about the year 1760 by a Quaker farmer named John Player who lived at Stoke Gifford. At first the surveying was probably only secondary to his main occupation of farming, but in 1772, Player was joined by his nephew Jacob Sturge and there are records of an established office and practice, then known as "Player & Sturge".

Jacob, the great-great-great-grandfather of the writer of these notes, must have had considerable ability and was certainly a draftsman of distinction, tithe maps and other plans drawn and signed by him still existing as evidence of this. He lived at Redhouse Farm, Combe Dingle, Bristol, a house still standing and is said to have been "plain in appearance and manner, industrious and unassuming", but tradition adds that he was "very peevish"!

Jacob trained as a surveyor his elder son Young Sturge, who, when his father retired, set up in 1799 a new office in Small Street, Bristol, with an agreement between father and son whereby the former surrendered the profits of "land measuring and planning heretofore carried on by him, on condition that his son shall give him assistance at the country office in all other branches of land and timber surveying".

Young Sturge lived at home and rode into the Bristol office daily, paying his parents £15 p.a. for board and washing and 4/- per week for the keep of his horse. The father undertook to provide various office necessities, such as a measuring chain, quadrant, and spirit level.

The Bristol business grew under Young's energetic management and in 1807 his younger brother Jacob Player Sturge, then only 13, was taken from school and employed under his father in the country office. Three years later he was articled to his brother for four years and began work at a new office in St. James Barton to which Young that year removed and where he went to live. Jacob Player Sturge was a

bright and industrious boy and rapidly became proficient in the work. The question of his salary caused dispute between Young and his father, the figure eventually being fixed at £30 p.a. with a promised rise of £10 p.a. which arrangement lasted until 1814 when he was admitted into partnership.

The firm was thenceforth known as "Y. & J. P. Sturge" so continuing until the death of Young Sturge in 1844.

The Sturges were Quakers and dressed after the strict manner of the sect, in drab clothes and a cocked hat, a custom so peculiar even then that a story is told that one day a farmer asked Young Sturge to get out of the way because "thee dost frighten the pig".

Young was highly respected, but perhaps lacking in humour. Once when his health was drunk at a City feast and a worthy alderman who had imbibed generously accosted him with "your good health Mr. Sturge" he replied "Friend, I hope that in drinking my health thou wilt have a care not to injure thine own". He was Land Steward to the Corporation of Bristol, this post later passing to his brother Jacob Player Sturge and then to the latter's son William Sturge, the three relatives holding the post successively for nearly a century.

After Young Sturge died in 1844, the name of the practice was changed to "J. P. Sturge & Sons", as it remains today.

A poem written by one of the Sturge daughters in 1840 and quoted at the end of this memoir gives a picture of a past age, yet is curiously applicable to the present day.

The office was later moved to Shannon Court and then to Corn Street, the business of the firm at this time consisting mainly in the surveying of land for purposes of the Enclosure Acts and the preparation of parish maps for tithe collection purposes.

William Sturge, son of Jacob Player Sturge, had entered the office in 1836 at the age of 16, became a partner in 1842 and in 1846 was appointed surveyor to the Bristol Waterworks Company, then just established, a management still held by the firm.

On the death of his father in 1857, William became head of the firm with two younger brothers as junior partners. The business rapidly increased and William Sturge was responsible for much of the valuation of the City of Bristol for rating purposes and parts of Somerset and Glamorgan, while he was Land Steward to the Corporation of Bristol for more than 40 years.

In 1868 he became one of the founder members of the (then) Surveyors' Institution and was elected on the first Council, becoming President in the year 1878. He won a fine reputation as an arbitrator and expert witness: he also played a prominent part in starting a local branch of the Institution.

He was prominently concerned with much of the acquisition of land for the Great Western Railway and remained a member of the firm of J. P. Sturge till the end of his long life in 1905.

His brothers Walter and Robert practised mainly in land agency, in which they were assisted by a nephew, Theodore Sturge.

A grandson of William, F. A. Sturge Goodbody, joined him just before his death and continued the practice with Theodore, becoming among other things first hon. secretary of the Gloucestershire branch of the Surveyors' Institution. He was also the first partner in the firm to take up auctioneering, a branch of the profession which had not previously been carried on by J. P. Sturge & Sons. The office had been moved in 1917 to 11, Orchard Street.

The last half of the 19th century and early 20th century had seen a great increase in building development in Bristol and the firm was responsible for surveying and planning many districts which have now long been fully developed, including large parts of Redland, Tyndalls Park, Horfield and Leigh Woods.

F. A. S. Goodbody died at an early age in 1929 and as the remaining partner, Theodore Sturge was already advanced in years, it became necessary to look outside the family and E. J. Clarke was invited to join the firm.

In 1937 P. E. Tyhurst and W. S. Goodbody, son of F. A. S. Goodbody were admitted as partners and a further period of expansion began. After the war larger offices were acquired at 24 Berkeley Square: C. P. Franklin became a partner shortly before the death of E. J. Clarke in 1950.

During the last 10 years growth has continued and there are now 6 partners and a staff of 30.

Both the scope of the work and the area covered have become more diverse. Four partners now deal with urban valuations, development and management mainly in Bristol and the South West, while two are engaged in Land Agency and rural estate management of widely distributed estates in England and Scotland. A building surveying department is maintained and land surveys, auctions and estate agency are carried out. P. E. Tyhurst and W. S. Goodbody are Land Steward and Surveyor respectively to the Society of Merchant Venturers.

The firm has always continued its support of the professional societies and W. S. Goodbody is at present a Member of Council of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

The work of the surveyor continues to increase and the pressure of life seems to intensify but some principles remain unchanging and two sentences written by William Sturge in 1896 to close his professional reminiscences may now well serve the same purpose:

“With all my long experience I find I am always learning something new, and I am conscious that I have made many mistakes. I have, however, endeavoured to maintain a character for integrity and a high standard in my profession”.

W.S.G.

The partners in April 1960 were:

P. E. TYHURST, M.B.E.

W. S. GOODBODY, F.R.I.C.S., M.T.P.I.

C. P. FRANKLIN, M.B.E., F.R.I.C.S., F.A.I.

R. G. H. M. KIRKWOOD, F.L.A.S.

MICHAEL R. CLARK, F.R.I.C.S., F.A.I.

J. G. S. YOUNG, A.R.I.C.S.

A VOICE OF WARNING

or

THE MISERIES OF A LAND SURVEYOR'S WIFE

(Written by Mary Sturge, 1840)

Surveyors' wives! Oh listen while I state
What is their dreary melancholy fate;
And pause ye fair, e'er entering on the life
That still awaits a Land Surveyor's wife.
What though your husband may his partner love,
And prize her company all else above,
It matters not, because so much he'll roam
That he will hardly ever be at home!
This business is the idol he will serve,
And for his business strain his every nerve,
Think not when evening spreads her mantle round,
Your Land-surveying husband will be found
At leisure to improve or cheer your mind
By reading some nice work of taste refined.
No, no—you'll find that when he is chez lui
He will sit down directly after tea,
With maps and papers thickly round him spread
And many a calculation in his head,
And if perchance you should the silence break,
And gently venture some remark to make,
You may expect to hear with frowning brow,
The words "My dear, thou interrupts me now,"
And nothing more than this can you attain,
Tho' you should ask and ask and ask again.

But many other grievances there are
Besides the silence, you will have to bear;

Perhaps at four the dinner he may fix,
But think it well if he arrive by six:
Hour after hour you look and patient wait,
And still no husband enters at the gate;
And when at length, his weary form appears
And, you endeavour to remove his cares,
Striving to banish business from his breast,
In hopes his jaded mind for once may rest;
Soon as the dinner cloth shall disappear
He will exclaim "My papers please, my dear."

* * *

Again sometimes you pleadingly will say
You wish your debts of visiting to pay:
And that you'd thankful feel if he would strive
A little way from town to take a drive;
"My dear, I am engaged this month to come,
There's not a day that I shall be at home,
So that's impossible," he will reply,
Whilst you will turn away and breathe a sigh.

Nor should I here forget how you must rise
Before the sun appears to gild the skies,
By candlelight his breakfast to prepare,
E'er he can face the keen and biting air.
At night most likely he'll return and then
You'll see him at his papers once again;
Or else he will come home so very late
That as from ten to twelve you sit and wait,
You wonder what on earth can make him stay,
And think he has been murdered by the way!

But now I think 'tis time my tale to close,
Having collected such a list of woes.
Too true it is they often mark the life
Of many a thorough-bred Surveyor's wife;
Though not of all, for, as we learn at school,
There are exceptions some to every rule;
But 'tis a chance; remember 'tis for life
If you become a Land Surveyor's wife.

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